

# LITHUANIA AGREES TO SUSPEND LAWS ON INDEPENDENCE

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## STRONGEST OVERTURE YET

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### Republic Also Asks Transition Talks to Separation — Aide Sent to Moscow

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By **BILL KELLER**

Special to The New York Times

**MOSCOW, May 16 —** The Lithuanian government formally agreed today to suspend all laws it has passed since its declaration of independence on March 11 and to discuss a transition period to full separation from the Soviet Union, officials of the republic said tonight.

The offer, prepared in a closed-door session of the Parliament and Cabinet, was the Lithuanians' most concerted attempt so far to persuade President Mikhail S. Gorbachev to lift his partial economic embargo and begin negotiations.

The Lithuanian Prime Minister, Kazimiera Prunskiene, was to fly to Moscow on Thursday bearing the government declaration and a letter to Mr. Gorbachev. It was not clear whether she would be met by Kremlin officials or whether Moscow would accept the gesture as an opportunity to end the standoff.

## **Respite for Gorbachev, Too?**

Mr. Gorbachev would presumably welcome a chance to end the economic sanctions against Lithuania, which could cast a pall over his meeting with President Bush in Washington. That meeting is to begin May 30, about the time that Lithuania expects to exhaust the last of its oil reserves.

As the Lithuanians met, Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d and Foreign Minister Eduard A. Shevardnadze of the Soviet Union started talks in Moscow on obstacles blocking a series of arms control agreements in advance of the summit. But the increasingly unstable situation in the Soviet Baltic republics threatened to derail their efforts. [Page A10.]

The proposal by the Lithuanians essentially embraced a compromise proposed last month by France and West Germany, which called for Lithuania to suspend the enforcement of its independence proclamation without actually repealing it.

### **Graceful Retreat for All**

When the proposal was made by President François Mitterrand and Chancellor Helmut Kohl, President Vytautas Landsbergis of Lithuania and a Kremlin spokesman both praised it as a possible escape from the deadlock.

But since then, Mr. Gorbachev has insisted that Lithuania return to its status of March 10, the day before it broke with Moscow, and follow secession procedures spelled out in a new Soviet law. This would require approval of independence by referendum, a transition period of up to five years, and final approval by the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies.

Lithuania and its neighboring Baltic

*Continued on Page A11, Column 1*

## Evolution in Europe: A Bend in the Lithuanian Road

# Lithuania Takes a Step Back on Independence

*Continued From Page A1*

republics, Latvia and Estonia, were annexed by Stalin in 1940 under a secret protocol to a pact with Hitler. The three republics say they were illegally incorporated and therefore will not submit to Soviet sovereignty.

An estimated 30,000 people in Lithuania have been laid off or sent on unscheduled vacations since Mr. Gorbachev cut off oil, most natural gas, and various other supplies to the republic.

The Lithuanians declined to disclose the text of their offer, but as explained by officials, it called for the suspension of the secession laws after Moscow agreed to begin negotiations and provided assurances that it would make no moves to supplant the current leadership of the republic.

Among the measures that would be suspended are several that Moscow

has cited as particularly offensive, including those abolishing the Soviet military draft and laying claim to national property.

"Basically, it's the offer Mitterrand and Kohl suggested," said Rita Dapkus, a spokeswoman for the Lithuanian Parliament. "We would be prepared to temporarily suspend the unilateral realization of those resolutions, which arise from the act of restoring state independence."

The proposal also offers to discuss an unspecified transition period to full sovereignty, to guarantee the rights of Soviet citizens in Lithuania, and to negotiate on Moscow's security concerns, which include the fate of military bases and Baltic ports.

After Lithuania declared a clean break with Moscow on March 11, Estonia announced on March 30 that it would make a step-by-step withdrawal from Soviet law. On May 4, Latvia made its declaration, apparently intended to minimize confrontation with Moscow. It established an open-ended transition period to independence, dur-

ing which most Soviet laws would apply.

Lithuania's offer today would put it more into line with the gradual approach adopted by Latvia and Estonia. Mr. Gorbachev this week rebuffed the more conciliatory approach of those two republics, issuing decrees declaring their actions invalid. But he has so far not imposed sanctions on them.

Anti-independence groups stormed the Parliament buildings in Latvia and Estonia on Tuesday.

Prime Minister Edgar Savisaar of Estonia, in a telegram to Mr. Baker at the outset of his visit to Moscow, de-

scribed the incident in the republic as an "attempted coup," and urged the Secretary of State to take up the issue in his talks with the Soviet leadership.

In Riga, The Associated Press quoted Deputy Prime Minister Ilmars Bisers of Latvia as saying that a delegation from the republic expected to have mid-level meetings in Moscow on the situation. Mr. Bisers, speaking today after returning to the Latvian capital from his own Moscow discussions, said talks with Soviet officials would focus on "the gaining of independence on the basis of a treaty with the Soviet Union."